

The Beaver Lake Monitor



A publication of the Beaver Lake Management District Advisory Board

<http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us/BLMD.aspx#Home> • Volume 14, Issue 1 • June 2013

Part 8 of the Series:

Living with Your Wildlife Neighbors: Owls! By Frank Blau



If you are lucky, on warm evenings in Beaver Lake Park, you may be graced with the vocal sounds or visual sightings of nesting barred owls (*Strix varia*).

The barred owls can be identified by their distinctive calls, which have been colorfully described as “who-cooks-for-you... who cooks for you all” as well as a variety of other clicks and screeches. When agitated (or hunting) the owls will make a high hissing noise. These magnificent local residents have made a home in the park for the last several years. Over the last three years there have been two successful births (called a “clutch”) of one to three baby owls. After nesting on two to four eggs for four to five weeks, they usually (and have again this year!) make their first appearance around Mother’s Day. After the first sighting, the baby owls spend a few weeks just peeking out of the nest and making a few tentative steps out into the world. After several weeks, they will eventually make their way out onto a branch and test their wings. At this point, you can often witness the mother owl trying to coax the fledgling owls out with food and soothing calls. Eventually, the babies begin to “fly” to other branches and

hunt their own food. The barred owl diet is generally mice, rats, snakes, voles and other small mammals and reptiles. By the time summer comes around, most of the owls have fully launched and will be off starting their own families in other parts of the park. Owls are very territorial and will even compete with their own parents for resources sometimes! Because of their opportunistic ability to hunt these animals in suburban settings, the barred owl has been able to successfully thrive in areas like Beaver Lake Park.

One thing that you may witness is a baby owl “falling” to the ground below the nest. While it may be alarming to see, do not approach or attempt to rescue the owlet. If you quietly observe, they will make their way back to the nesting tree and use their long, sharp talons to climb back to the nest, all under the protective and watchful eyes of one or both of the parents.

It is also worth a reminder that during this time it is important to keep ALL dogs on leashes in this area. Dogs are instinctual creatures and will charge at and even attack the baby owls if they are on the ground. This could result in injury to both parties, but generally the owls are the ones that will suffer the most in this encounter. Please, respect nature (and the Sammamish City Ordinance) and keep your dog on a leash in Beaver Lake Park.

While not strictly speaking a native species, these raptors have migrated to

the Pacific Northwest and south into Oregon and Northern California in recent decades, in some cases replacing the more reclusive and endangered spotted owl from old growth habitat. Because the barred owl is more robust and adaptable to a wider variety of habitat, it is evolutionarily predisposed to this dominance. While the spotted owl is still under well-deserved environmental protection, the barred owl’s prolific breeding and adaptability have made it the more common species in our ecosystem.

In addition to the barred owls, there is also the occasional large and domineering great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), a natural predator of the barred owl, as well as the small rare northern saw-whet owl (*Aegolius acadicus*). While sightings of these other raptors are rare, they have been seen concurrent with the nesting barred owls. If a great horned owl makes a permanent roost in the area, the barred owls will often move out to give their more aggressive predator space to hunt and breed. There are also herons, eagles and many other species of birds that can be easily seen in this beautiful park.



Story continued on page 7

Living with Your Wildlife Neighbors: Owls!

(continued from page 1)

To see the owls, park in the main parking lot near the Beaver Lake Lodge and follow the sidewalk to the right and take the trail that goes behind the maintenance shed. There you will find a larger, wider trail into the park. Follow this trail for about 100 yards and there it intersects with another trail that goes left. At the intersection of these trails, look around, the owls are often seen in the tall cedar trees in this area.

The baby owls often just appear as a ball of white tufted feathers high in the cedar tree. But patience is often rewarded with the baby peering down curiously with his/her large dark eyes. Juvenile barred owls will often fly down closer to practice their hunting and intimidation skills with visitors. The mature owls are brown and white with rounded (not pointed) ears and a rounded tail and horizontal bars on their chest. The males and females appear remarkably similar, with the only visual difference being that the females are generally larger than their male companions. Though they are primarily nocturnal hunters, the best time to see them is in the early evening, as they are often hunting and delivering food to the hungry young ones during this time.

For more information about barred owls see: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barred_Owl/id

Frank Blau has been photographing the barred owls in Beaver Lake Park for several years, and his photos can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/bumle5o>



City News

Environmentally Critical Areas update:

The City of Sammamish City Council is considering amendments to the Environmentally Critical Area regulations in early June, with amendment adoption by July. The amendments include a number of updates to the regulations, including an update to the water quality protections for Beaver and Pine lakes.

The water quality amendments include: (1) improvements to the “thresholds” used for requiring stormwater treatment for water quality; (2) providing for new options for water quality treatment that demonstrably meet the Department of Ecology standards; and (3) providing for consistent engineering design specifications with the other regulations. It is expected that these amendments will improve water quality protection to both lakes, as well as simplifying the review process.

Other changes under review include a pilot program for subdivisions along the west side of the Sammamish plateau, providing an option to pay a fee-in-lieu of mitigating impacts to streams and wetlands, and allowing for additional flexibility in expanding existing single family homes.

Trossachs Division 16 & 17:

The last two phases of the Trossachs subdivision (collectively known as Divisions 16 & 17) are on track to start construction of road and other utility improvements during the summer of 2013 (Division 16) and 2014 (Division 17).

Division 16 is located to the east of the Beaver Lake bog (ELS 21), and will be accessed via SE 12th Street and 267th Place SE. Twenty-eight lots and homes will be built as part of Division 16. The city is currently reviewing proposed infrastructure plans (known as site development permits) for Trossachs Division 16, which will likely be issued in the near future.

Division 17 is located to the north of the Beaver Lake bog, and will be accessed from SE 9th Way. Twenty-three lots are planned as part of Division 17. The developer for this project has indicated that construction of Trossachs Division 17 is anticipated for the summer of 2014.

Both projects are designed to minimize impacts to the Beaver Lake bog, including large “buffer” offsets from the edge of the bog of 215 feet, as well as increased water quality protection and water quality monitoring requirements.